

## Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

### George Masa

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Having studied a little photojournalism in college, photography has become a resurgent interest of mine and I was caught by a recent cover of the Mountain Xpress, Asheville's alternative weekly newspaper. It has a striking image of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, taken by George Masa.

Masa was a driving force behind the creation of the park, which celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. George, whose original name was Masahara Izuka, was a Japanese immigrant, coming to the U.S. in 1901, settling in Asheville in 1915. He took a job as a bellhop at the Grove Park Inn, where his interest in photography blossomed. Masa fell in love with the Smoky Mountains and they became a focus of his photographs, leading him to work closely with writer Horace Kephart as an advocate for the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which was established in 1934, a year after Masa's death.

It's easy to get cynical about the notion that one person can make a difference. But then there's George Masa. He was from Japan – an outsider's outsider. He held no position of power or authority – he started out here as a hotel bellhop. But he had a passion for the Smokies. Today that passion is the most visited national park in the nation, a cornerstone of our region's tourism industry, and a sanctuary for our region's natural heritage.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.